

Harold Dadford West, Ph.D., LL.D.: A Good Man and True*

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THE MEHARRY SPIRIT

MEHARRY Medical College has been conspicuous, perhaps exceptional, in the extent to which it has given significant recognition to those who have labored long in its service, and also, in the degree to which its alumni have accepted responsibility for continuous contribution to its financial support.



Dr. Cobb

The close-knit and intensely loyal spirit of the Meharry family may have been due in part to the fact that meager financial resources and forced in-breeding made the matter of survival for most of the school's existence a serious consideration. However produced, that spirit has been a vital force both in the survival of the school and in the quality of the professionals trained at Meharry.

Now that brighter days are ahead and there are firm commitments in new brick and stone to the recognition of Meharry as an integral part of the health science educational system in the United States, let us hope that that invigorating spirit will grow apace in the hearts of the new generations of Meharryites

to whom the torch will be consecutively passed.

While no new edifice, open or to be constructed, can exceed in significance the Harold Dadford West Basic Sciences Center dedicated today, it will be appropriate to cite a few examples of the gratitude and generosity manifest in the Meharry spirit to which I have just alluded.

EARLIER MEMORIALS

Your hospital bears the name of Dr. George Whipple Hubbard, a white man who was a founder and the first president of the institution.¹ One of your early alumni, Dr. John Wesley Anderson, in 1917, donated an Anatomy Building to Meharry to replace the barn hitherto used for dissections.² This is the only instance of which I am aware in which an Afro-American has donated a building to his *alma mater* in appreciation of what she gave him.

You have your long established Hale-Macmillan Lecture series honoring two revered former teachers. There is the Daniel T. Rolfe Cafeteria, affording daily reminder of the jovial figure and contributions of your late professor of physiology and dean.³

As many of you know, the *Journal of the National Medical Association* has since 1952 featured on the cover of each number an individual who has been important in the history of the Afro-American in medicine. In this way it has been possible to salute 106 persons whose lives and works were worthy of the permanent record.

The criteria for inclusion in this series have been very simple. The person so honored must be either dead or retired and must have made some identifiable contribution.

There was a notable exception to this rule

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in the case of the *Edward Perry Crump Number* for July, 1971. This was so inscribed at the request of colleagues, alumni and friends who had worked with him at Meharry and wanted him to have this evidence of their esteem. Your then and present dean, Dr. Ralph J. Cazort, wrote the tribute to Dr. Crump, at that time a youth of 61.⁴

In an expression which to my knowledge is unique, while he yet lives in full vigor, you have named the Matthew Walker Health Center for your former professor and chairman of surgery and current provost.

Though never acquisitive, I wish at this time publicly to lay claim to Dr. Walker as one of my students. In 1938,⁵ while I was still a young full-time teacher at Howard, there appeared a young man who was there regularly at 8:00 A.M., but who looked a bit older than the freshmen and did not respond to any name on the roll call. Eventually he explained that he was Dr. Matthew Walker (Meharry, '34), fresh from a teaching residency at Hubbard and that he had come to Howard for further study in surgery under Dr. Edward L. Howes. I explained my delight at having so eager a student among us and offered him the privilege of taking the examination. This he had to forego because of the pressure of surgical duties, but he never missed a lecture in the entire course. Tonight as we approach an age when we should be "desirous of setting in order all our worldly affairs, ere Almighty God shall call us hence," I want to offer Dr. Walker the opportunity of a few review sessions in embryology in the cool, quiet hours of the evening, lightened by mutual sipping of the rare medicinal spirit which he keeps on hand for emergencies, so that I can give him his examination and he can get credit for that course in embryology 38 years ago.

A FAR, FAR BETTER THING

In the dedication of the present center you have taken a further step of profound symbolic meaning both in respect to Dr. West and to the Basic Sciences. I would say, to borrow from Dickens, "This you do now is a far, far better thing than you have ever done."

LINKS WITH DOCTOR WEST

I believe I have the honor of standing here tonight because you know that I was Harold's classmate in Dunbar High School in Washington (1921) and that like his, my career has been in medical education over the same period of time, in the course of which I have been privileged to acquire an extensive knowledge of and esteem for Meharry.

I realize that I am reasonably expected to bring to bear the additional perspective derived from 26 years as editor of the *Journal of the National Medical Association* and the same length of time as a member of the National Board of Directors of the NAACP. This has presented no difficulties.

Dr. Louis T. Wright, legendary director of the Department of Surgery, at Harlem Hospital in New York, had been chairman of the Board of the NAACP for 19 years at the time of his passing in 1952.^{6,7} Although I did not meet him until eight years before his death, we became the closest of friends during that time. It was at his behest that I wrote two pamphlets published by the NAACP in 1947 and 1948, respectively. The first, "Medical Care and the Plight of the Negro,"⁸ was a horizontal analysis of the current scene. The second, "Progress and Portents for the Negro in Medicine,"⁹ was a vertical or historical picture. Both proved to be influential but were not popular with the power structure of the time.

Dr. Wright's step-father, Dr. William Fletcher Penn, whom he revered, was Mrs. Harold West's father and he maintained a warm place in his heart for Mrs. Jessie Penn West. He always followed Harold's career with the greatest interest.

We also had Dr. West's son, Dr. Harold D. West, Jr. at Howard for a year. This did not afford adequate time to get hold of him enough really to anneal his anatomical knowledge, but as with Dr. Walker, I should be most happy to join with him as he might like, in further explorations of Vesalius' inexhaustible lore.

A GOOD MAN AND TRUE

I have called this tribute, "Harold Dad-

ford West—A Good Man and True.” Because you already have adequate biographical data on Harold and because most competent professionals have already elucidated for you his scientific work, it remains for me to deal with his character and career from a philosophical point of view.

After a long and carefully developed discussion, Socrates concluded that the pursuit of virtue was the highest calling of man. But having determined this, his always intellectually demanding inquiry led to the question, “What is virtue?” This is treated in several of the Dialogues but perhaps most fully in the Protagoras where the classical five parts of virtue are enumerated. Is virtue one thing or many things? Is it wisdom, is it justice, is it holiness, is it temperance, is it courage? Is virtue all of these, or any one of them or any combination of them? The further the argument proceeds the more uncertainties develop, but we are left with the recognition that although a precise definition is unattainable we all understand what virtue is in a very real sense. In everyday language we would call it the good.

In this context, Harold comes off very well indeed. We all know that he was wise and full of knowledge. You have long seen that he was just and fair. Without pretension he was devout and temperate and he was certainly courageous in the face of many difficulties. Harold West was a good man.

NO DEADLY SIN

But there have always been other approaches to the appraisal of character. We all recall the admonition of Jesus to the crowd about to stone the woman taken in adultery. “Let him that is without sin among you, cast the first stone,” and they all went away.

Yet the recognition that nobody was perfect did not stop debate on sin and the degrees of sin. These became very intense in medieval discussions of morality. They were crystallized in the 13th century by St. Thomas Aquinas, who defined what have since been known as the “Seven Deadly

Sins, allegorized in innumerable dramatic presentations. They were: pride, greed, lust, envy, anger, gluttony and sloth.

Let us consider Harold in the light of these. You yourselves who lived with him for years know well the answers. Harold was without “deadly sin.”

ENVIRONMENTAL RAPPORT

There is one other aspect of Harold’s character important here. He had friendly rapport with those of both the human species and the animal kingdoms, who did not know him. We could say that in non-verbal communication of both cognitive and experiential varieties he had achieved a stable ecological equilibrium with his environment, but no one would know what we meant by such a polysyllabic effusion of euphonious gobbledygook.

Longfellow said it better in a different context in a poem many of us learned in graded school:

Then the little Hiawatha
Learned of every bird its language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How they built their nests in Summer,
Where they hid themselves in Winter,
Talked with them whene’er he met them,
Called them “Hiawatha’s Chickens.”

Of all the beasts he learned the language.
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How the beavers built their lodges,
Where the squirrels hid their acorns,
How the reindeer ran so swiftly,
Why the rabbit was so timid,
Talked with them whene’er he met them,
Called them “Hiawatha’s Brothers.”

Then Iagoo, the great boaster,
He the marvellous story-teller,
He the traveller and the talker,
He the friend of old Nokomis,
Made a bow for Hiawatha;
From the branch of ash he made it,
From an oak-bough made the arrows,
Tipped with flint, and winged with feathers,
And the cord he made of deer-skin.

Then he said to Hiawatha:
 "Go, my son, into the forest,
 Where the red deer herd together,
 Kill for us a famous roebuck,
 Kill for us a deer with antlers!"
 Forth into the forest straightway
 All alone walked Hiawatha
 Proudly, with his bow and arrows;
 And the birds sang round him, o'er him,
 "Do not shoot us, Hiawatha!"
 Sang the robin, the Opechee,
 Sang the bluebird, the Owaissa,
 "Do not shoot us, Hiawatha!"
 Up the oak-tree, close beside him,
 Sprang the squirrel, Adjidaumo,
 In and out among the branches,
 Coughed and chattered from the oak-tree,
 Laughed, and said between his laughing.
 "Do not shoot me Hiawatha!"
 And the rabbit from his pathway
 Leaped aside, and at a distance
 Sat erect upon his branches,
 Half in fear and half in frolic,
 Saying to the little hunter,
 "Do not shoot me, Hiawatha!"
 But he heeded not, nor heard them,
 For his thoughts were with the red deer.

Harold lived at peace with all around him
 and always knew what his target was.

RECOGNITION OF THE BASIC SCIENCES

It is especially fitting that this building memorializing Dr. West also recognizes the importance of the basic sciences, in one of which Harold labored so long and effectively. These sciences, anatomy, biochemistry, physiology, pathology, pharmacology and microbiology undergird all the clinical fields of the health related sciences.

Anatomy is the most important of these, of course, because it embraces everything in the universe from supergalaxies to electrons. Biochemistry obviously is only ultra-microscopic or molecular anatomy. Thus Harold might be said to have been an ultimate anatomist and I embrace him as a colleague in the sense of Edwin Markham's famous poem,

He drew a circle
 To shut me out.
 Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
 But love and I had the wit to win
 We drew a circle
 That took him in.

Lest you think I speak with bias for my own field, I have merely given you truth by revelation against which there can be no argument, so that an anatomist can always enfold a biochemist within the larger circle. So widespread has the perception of this relationship become that some anatomy departments today are seeking biochemists to head them.

Since, as I have said, we need not dwell here upon Harold's researches, we may comment upon what they did for him and those who worked with him.

Plato said that every man in any occupation must have a creative outlet—the cobbler in making fine shoes, the stone mason in erecting strong buildings, the carpenter in fashioning beautiful woodwork, and so on. For a biochemist his creative outlet is in his research, in being curious about the unknown, in formulating problems and step by step, discovering answers. So it was with Harold. Dr. Calvin C. Sampson, once his student, now professor of pathology at Howard and assistant editor of the *Journal of the NMA*, tells me that Harold always enjoyed his research and readily explained it to students or any visitor who was interested. Dr. Sampson was joint author with me of the tribute in the *Harold Dadford West Number* of our *Journal* for July 1974.¹⁰

THE THIRD CLASS CITIZENS OF MEDICAL EDUCATION

Now I feel it necessary to refer to a less pleasant aspect of working in the basic sciences, the customary low salaries. Harold, until he became president, worked for a low salary although I do not know the figures, as did I for the first 44 of my 45 years in teaching. This matter I addressed in an editorial in May 1973, entitled, "The Third Class Citizens of Medical Education."¹¹

It read in part, "Medical education today has become a three-layered caste system, which could hardly be called a product of rational evolution. Rather it is the transient current result of complex, sometimes, accidental, often competing and always confusing forces operating in our society.

"At the top is the administrative level, which has mushroomed into gargantuan proportions within recent years. Next are the clinicians who have an obvious vested interest in the income derived from patient care. At the bottom, as third class citizens, are the basic science teachers, who must depend for livelihood upon their lower salaries, which may be occasionally and with no consistency, supplemented by allowances from grants.

"The proliferation of administrators represents an expensive and inessential superfluity which should be stopped. The clinicians carefully nurtured hegemony over patient care as a justification for the fees which produce their greater income should be corrected and the debasement of the basic science teachers to the role of third class citizens should be eliminated.

"Not too long ago M.D.s worked freely in the preclinical fields, but today basic science departments are staffed chiefly by Ph.D.s, holders of master's degrees and graduate students. The controlling reason is money and nothing else. Medical graduates are no longer finding careers in the basic sciences attractive, whatever their fundamental interests, because of the higher income beckoning from the clinical fields. The greatest detriment accrues from the damage done to our health care delivery system, but collateral harm is done to the orientation, productivity and proper sense of humility on the part of both clinicians and preclinicians."

It could be that the unanticipated surge of malpractice insurance costs has made unincorporated independent practice less attractive. Certainly, there has been some recent improvement in institutional salary differentials and the growing multidisciplinary approaches in the treatment of patients have breached traditional patterns, but much remains to be done. No one can foresee precisely what the future will bring, but surely

no worker in the Harold D. West Basic Sciences Center should labor at the level of remuneration Dr. West did for so many of his creative years.

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

In staying on even keel in this our little life, I have found it a useful device to look behind when frustrated and see how far we have come, and when elated over some minor success to look ahead and see how far there is to go. This usually restores balance. Perhaps such retrospect and prospect will afford some useful perspective on Dr. West's career.

Harold served under three Meharry presidents before being elevated to the presidency himself in 1952, the first Afro-American to hold the post. When Dr. West came to Meharry in 1927, Dr. John J. Mallowney was president. Dr. Mallowney had been a medical missionary in China and wrought many improvements in the school.

His overall attitude was paternalistic, however, and he states in his book, "America Gives a Chance," that he regarded his tenure at Meharry as "semi-missionary work."¹²

This attitude proved to be not altogether passive. During the late 20's and into the 40's the General Education Board awarded a number of fellowships to Meharry and Howard for the training of young physicians for return to their schools to bolster the faculty. Those to Meharry were administered by Dr. Mallowney and those to Howard by Dr. Numa P.G. Adams, the first Afro-American dean there and the first martyr to the job.¹³

Dr. Adams strongly urged his medical graduates to secure the Ph.D. or equivalent for their training and all of his selections did. Dr. Mallowney, however, made no such stipulation and none of his men acquired an advanced degree at that time.

But Dr. Mallowney went further. He complained to Dr. Adams and to Dr. Robert A. Lambert, then associate medical director of the Rockefeller Foundation, who represented the General Education Board, that Dr. Adams in pushing his men to get an advanced degree put too much pressure on him

at Meharry and that such a degree was not necessary. Dr. Lambert leaned lightly on Dr. Adams, but without effect, I am happy to say. Today many schools are offering combination courses leading to the M.D., Ph.D. degrees.

Dr. Edward L. Turner was president of Meharry from 1938 to 1944. He had been a distinguished internist at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. He was a skillful administrator who in turn effected many improvements.

Dr. Turner was followed in 1945 by Dr. M. Don Clawson, a dentist who had also served at the American University of Beirut and had been dean of the Meharry Dental School. During Dr. Clawson's tenure Meharry's financial problems became especially acute. Following his resignation in 1950 the College was run by an interim committee chaired by Dr. Robert A. Lambert until Dr. West's elevation in 1952, with the financial problems still unsolved.

The selection of Dr. West as president was epochal. It was deliberate. The interim committee had had time to weigh and consider all possibilities, someone from without or someone from within. The choice of Harold had a triple significance. He was a man thoroughly known to Meharrians. He had their confidence. He was an Afro-American. This indicated that the missionary attitude expressed by Dr. Mullooney was gone forever. Dr. West was a basic scientist and there was thus expressed the recognition that although not himself an M.D., a man expert in the most fundamental of the medical sciences, could run a medical school and by his performance secure support for it. What a tribute to the quality of man.

On February 23, 1963, 13 years ago, it was my honor to serve as toastmaster at a magnificent banquet in the new Nashville Municipal Auditorium, honoring Dr. West for his 36 years service at Meharry, the last of 11 of them as its president.¹⁴ On this impressive occasion one of the most impressive things to me was the financial power represented among the guests. Although crying financial needs were mentioned, I

thought to myself that the decision has been made where it counts, not to let Meharry close.

Now your well advanced building program shows that this intuition was correct. No one can tell exactly how all this came about. Doubtless many factors, local and national, were influential, but there can be no doubt that the performance and stable integrity which Harold West had shown at the helm of the institution contributed mightily to the loosening of the large purse strings.

Harold never made any noise and he did not live to finish his history of Meharry Medical College. Hence his first hand account of these exciting years will be denied us, but the story must be researched and told.

Dr. Lloyd C. Elam, as Meharry's sixth president, has a wonderful heritage and faces an exciting challenge to which his great ability is responding, as revealed in his article, *Meharry's New Directions*.¹⁵ It is certain that your able Board of Trustees under the leadership of its distinguished chairman, Mr. Victor Johnson, will provide the necessary support and guidance. Also, that the powerful cohesive force of the Meharry spirit developed over your first century, will make the alumni an ever greater resource.

The Journal of the NMA had great pleasure in producing its *New Meharry Number* in July 1973. The excellent illustrated articles it contains, led by the historical account by Dr. Axel Hansen, provide ample background on Meharry today and what has made it.¹⁶ It whets our appetite for the remainder of your Centennial Year which the *Journal* hopes to commemorate in a *Meharry Centennial Number* in November 1976.

L'ENVOI

Though Harold is no longer with us in the flesh, his spirit lives in this building and through your lives. Let us not lament too much that he could not finish his work, for no man does. Mankind himself is not finished. May I close with a poem by William DeWitt Hyde, long time president of Bowdoin College, here dedicated to Harold.

Lord of Creation, we give thee thanks
 That this Thy world is incomplete;
 That battle calls our marshalled ranks
 That work awaits our hands and feet.
 That Thou hast not yet finished man,
 That we are in the making still
 As friends who share the Maker's plan,
 As sons who know the Father's will.
 Since what we choose is what we are
 And what we love we yet shall be
 The goal may ever shine afar
 But the will to win it makes us free.

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AFTER THE DEDICATORY BANQUET



L. to r. Victor Johnson, chairman of the Meharry Board of Trustees; Dr. Clem Russ, professor and chairman, Department of Physiology, Dr. Edward G. High, professor and chairman, Department of Biochemistry, Dr. Matthew Walker, provost, Dr. W. Montague Cobb, and Dr. Lloyd C. Elam.

HAROLD D. WEST FELLOWSHIP AWARD

Dr. Edward G. High, professor and chairman of the Department of Biochemistry, has announced the establishment of a *Harold D. West Graduate Student Fellowship Award in Biochemistry*. It is requested that all contributions be sent to Meharry Medical College with checks drafted to the Harold D. West Fellowship Award in Biochemistry.